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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a 10-week, after school reading program developed to motivate reluctant readers through reading aloud to them and through giving them books to read. Appropriate paperback books were read aloud to unmotivated readers in grades 3 and 4 for about 10 minutes or until a particularly exciting part of the story was reached. At that exciting part, the reader stopped and copies of the book were quickly distributed to the children to keep. The children were never told to finish the story; rather, they were told that it would be finished at the next meeting if they wanted it finished. A rating scale was developed and given to the children's teachers to rate the children at the beginning and conclusion of the program. Results of repeated use of the reading program indicated that the children improved in both motivation and reading skills. Two types of interviews with the children confirmed the validity of these results. (JL)

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Improving Reading Motivation

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Running Head: Reading Motivation

Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, April 1983

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ABSTRACT

A growing phenomenon in elementary education is the child who seems to posess all of the skills necessary to read but for some reason won't. This increase in reluctant of unmotivated readers seems to coincide with the overuse of television.

A number of studies show that many children who do develop both the skills and the motivation to read are children who were read-aloud to. The North End Community Center developed a Listening Club to motivate neighborhood children to read through reading-aloud to them.

The results of the study, evaluating the Listening Club Program, indicated that reading-aloud to children in the format of the club did increase the children's reading skill and their motivation. Numerous instances of children reading to younger siblings or even parents was an unexpected and heart-warming outcome of the program.

Improved Reading Motivation

Ten year old Adele was not limited in any way. In fact, her school work in many areas was well ahead of others in her class, but she did not want to read. She failed to do any reading assignments on her own and barely was able to read along with her class. Testing revealed no obvious cause for this phenomenon which seems to be on the rise in elementary classrooms. Adele appeared to be an unmotivated reader. It was not that she couldn't; she simply didn't want to read. Why was Adele a reluctant reader?

At least two causes have been alleged, the over-use of television and a decline in adults reading to children. Trelease (1982) noted that:

> Ninety-eight percent of the homes in America have a television set and nearly one out of every two families has more than one set, the average set is on for six and one-quarter hours a day, the television industry estimates that 2 million children under the age of 11 are still watching TV at midnight each night, and the average kindergarten graduate has already seen more than 5,000 hours of television in his young lifetime. That is more time than it takes to obtain a bachlor's degree. (p. 23)

> The Federal government alone spends nearly $20 billion a year on teaching people how to read.

> Nevertheless, for all the buying power and brain power expanded in this war on ignorance, we continue to sustain heavy losses among our young:

> The Department of Education reports that one million teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 cannot read at even a fourth-grade level. Eighty-one percent of U. S. colleges (including the prestigious Ivy League) have had to provide remedial composition courses for freshmen. Our major city libraries are watching their circulation figures spiral downward.

> If we are spending immense amounts of time and money in teaching children to read and they are not reading, we can only conclude that something is wrong. The problem is that we have concentrated exclusively on teaching the child how to read, and we have forgotten to teach him to want to read. To want to read. There is the key: desire. It is the prime mover, the magic ingredient. There is no success story written today-in the arts, business, education, athletics-in which desire does not play a leading role. (p.24)

The historian, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (1979), a strong advocate for reading aloud to children, commented;

> Do parents still read to children in this age of television? I hope they do, because reading to children when they are young is alleged to be one of the best ways of encouraging them to read to themselves when they are older.
>
> The serious point of children's books is not to improve the child's behavior but to expand his imagination. Great children's literature creates a fictional world which the child enters with delight and from which he returns with insights and reflections that his own experience could not have produced and that enrich and illuminate that experience. (p. 3)

According to Cynthia Butler (1980), reading scores will improve as a result of a regular reading aloud program. While parents read aloud to their children, knowing instinctively that they are encouraging language growth too often teachers feel guilty about taking time from their teaching to do the same. However, reading aloud in the classroom is of far greater value than generally supposed. Not only is it a means of introducing students to good literature, but also it is a tool for growth in specific reading areas.

Vail (note 1) indicated that even a poor reader derives personal, cultural and academic benefit from being read to in the classroom. She found that children who have not been read

to will often miss obvious context clues because they lack a feel for the flow of the larger picture. This lack also inhibits appreciation because it results in word by word reading. She suggested that a child can "catch" language by being read to.

McCormick (1977) cited studies which enabled her to state, "Research now provides evidence of the direct relationship between reading-aloud to children and reading performance, language development, and the development of reading interests" (p.143). She and Bellon (1975) mentioned classic studies by such researchers as Chomsky, Cohen, and Durkin. Their findings and others (Raftery, 1974; Stallings, 1980) showed that reading-aloud to children of preschool and elementary age improved vocabulary, comprehension, syntex, and fostered a richness of language unattainable otherwise. The New York Public Library has conducted surveys in conjunction with their reading aloud programs. Reluctant (non-motivated) readers attending these sessions have shown a new enthusiasm which was noted by their teachers and statistically substantiated by the books the students checked out.

It follows that listening skills also have shown growth during a reading-aloud period (Lundsteen, 1979). Studies indicated that there was high correlation between good reading and good listening and that regular reading-aloud to children, from infancy to teenage, improved reading, writing, speaking, and creative thinking. The lack of being read to aloud, allegedly caused by the lack of reading materials, was the primary reason given in asserting that poor children were educationally deprived. Whether done in the home or in the school, reading-aloud to children seems

to help improve a variety of reading skills as well as helping to improve their motivation toward reading and toward books.

The North End Community Center (NECC) is a privately funded United Way agency serving the neighborhood surrounding the Brightwood Elementary School. One objective of the agency is to serve the educational needs of the children of the neighborhood, many of whom are members of minority groups. Well over half of the residents served by the NECC are Spanish Surnamed.

While the agency has supported educational programs to help non-English speaking children to succeed in English, it became increasingly apparent that more and more of the children, and not just those who had learned English as their second language, were not showing much enthusiasm for reading or for books in general. The response by the NECC was to establish a Listening Club.

The objective of the club was to provide a unique program to motivate children to read partly through reading aloud to them and partly by giving them books to read. All of the children who were invited to participate in the Listening Club were recommended by their teachers as being reluctant readers.

The club procedures were developed to permit a teacher or other adult to spend but a few minutes each week to work with a small group of children after school by reading aloud to them and were followed for every session.

1. The children, identified as unmotivated readers were gathered after school in groups of five or six. Children, in grades 3-4 at the Brightwood

School, were selected for lack of motivation not lack of reading ability.

2. A book was selected that was interesting to the children, not too long, and at the appropriate reading level, and was a paper-back or other inexpensive consumable.
3. The book was read aloud for about ten minutes or until a particularly exciting part of the story was about to take place. Planning was a must!
4. Just at the brink of the exciting part, the reader suddenly stopped!
5. Copies of the book were quickly distributed, one to each child for him/her to KEEP FOR THEIR VERY OWN.
6. The children were NEVER told to finish the story, rather they were told that the story would be finished at the next meeting of the club if anyone wanted it finished. Some children actually finished the story before they left the club meeting area. A few children did ask to have the story finished because they liked having the now familiar story read to them.

The program began at Brightwood during school year 1978-79, and since then, two ten week sessions have been conducted for the last three years. During the entire program all of the reading was done by a staff member of the NECC.

The objective of the present study was to determine if the program has had any measurable effect on the motivation of children

as seen in their general behavioral characteristics and whether or not the children experienced any increase in their reading skill as rated by teachers. To gather such data, a rating scale was developed and was divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of the first five items, rated the reading behavior, motivation and relationships of the children in the program. The last eight items rated the general behavioral characteristics of the child. Each part of the rating form showed a strong internal consistency reliability of .89 and .90 respectively. The coefficient of stability was estimated for the past year as .69 and .72 for each part of the rating scale respectively.

The rating scale was given to those teachers at Brightwood who were responsible for teaching reading to those children selected. The teachers were asked to rate each child at the time of recommendation and then at the end of the program ten weeks later. The results of those ratings are shown in Table I.

Insert Table 1 about here

As can be seen, the ratings indicated that children served by the club improved in their rated motivation and in their reading skill. The conclusion, after six replications, was that the procedures of the club were effective in increasing the motivation of children toward reading and books.

Gloria does not look like a happy girl and has had a relatively poor atterdance pattern. She was recommended for the Listening Club and has seemed to respond appropriately. When she missed several sessions of the club she asked the reader for

the copies of the books that she had missed. Asked what she was going to do with them she replied that she reads them aloud to her mother who can not read English. It seems that she has to miss school every so often to take care of her younger brother whom she entertains by reading her club books to him. She knows every story by heart.

How valid was the rating scale for the children at Brightwood? To determine that answer an interview was conducted with each child finishing the program. The interviewer asked seven standard questions individually. The answers were scored on a scale from one to ten with children who read all of their books more than once, read them to a number of people, lent them to others to read and kept them safely being defined as highly motivated and given high scores. Gloria received a high score. Children who did not read their books either to themselves or others, who never lent them out or never treated their books well were judged as being less motivated and were given lower scores.

The interview scores were then correlated with each of the Reading Behavior ratings. The coefficients were significant, and the conclusion was drawn that the teacher's rating was an accurate indication of the motivation of the child.

Insert Table 2 about here

To determine that the interview was a valid measure of the motivation of children with ratings being made by a NECC staff member, a comparison was made with reading achievement of the forty children served by the club at Brightwood in 1981-82, 16

were also served and tested by the staff providing compensatory education services (Title I). Nine of those sixteen children had low scores and were judged to have low motivation, having interview scores of five or less. Those nine children lost an average of three months between the testing of May, 1981 and May, 1982. Seven children were judged to be motivated by the Listening Club interview, scoring six or higher. These children gained seven months between the two testings. This evidence suggests that the interview questionnaire did identify correctly those who were motivated and those who were not.

In summary, the NECC, recognizing the need for a reading motivation program to help the children of the neighborhood learn and appreciate books and reading, began a read-aloud program that featured reading a story to a small group of children to some climactic point and then giving each child a copy of the book to keep. The results of the study, evaluating the Listening Club Program, indicated that reading-aloud to children in the format of the club did increase the children's reading skill and their motivation. Numerous instances of children reading to younger siblings or even parents was an unexpected and heartwarming outcome of the program.

The program was designed so that teachers or parents could spend a minimal amount of time to achieve a significant increase in reading motivation. Children are almost saturated by television and often overlook the great imaginative value contained in good books. Parents, teachers and other friends of children need to encourage children to read, and can do so most effectively by reading to them.

Reference Notes

1. Vail, P. L. Limerence: Listening, verbal expression and comprehension in reading. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Orton Society, Inc., Dallas, TX., November 1977. (ED 151726)

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Table 1

Average Rated Scores for LC Participants
At Brightwood

		Reading Behavior		General Behavior	
Year	n	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1979-80	13	11.6	17.0*	20.5	27.2*
1980-81	34	14.0	16.9*	24.6	28.6*
1981-82	40	12.4	15.2*	24.8	28.3*

*Change significant at .05

Table 2

Intercorrelation of Interview Scores
with Teacher Ratings of Reading Behavior

	Int.	Oct.	Jan.	Mar.
Int.	—			
Oct.	.33*	—		
Jan.	.40*	.47*	—	
Mar.	.29	.25	.76*	—

* Significantly different from zero at .05